



In Lebanon, youth and women are the target of a marketing campaign featuring a new tobacco product for use with the more traditional water pipe.

cigarette tobacco epidemic. Lebanon has the dubious position among Arab countries of being the only one with relatively equal rates of cigarette smoking among men and women. The water pipe is a traditional form of tobacco smoked in Arab countries, including Lebanon. Recently, trends have shifted between tobacco types, and water pipe smoking is becoming the preference for young people and women specifically, ousting the once more popular cigarette. As an indicator of its popularity, thriving new delivery services have appeared, linked to mobile phones. By using their phones in accordance with prescribed directions, customers can even specify the number and flavour of pipes they want. According to how many times they call the sales line, the appropriate water pipe(s) will be delivered to their home for the equivalent of just US\$1 dollar apiece.

Taking advantage of this visible trend, the state subsidised tobacco company recently launched a new tobacco product for use with the water pipe. It is clearly aimed at the youth market—its name, “Shabablek”, literally translates as “Youthful”. Its advertisements depict young men and women enjoying evenings out on the town. Ironically, with an eye on an ever “health conscious consumer”, the new product comes in individually wrapped portions (hitherto in large bales) and the promise that it has not been touched by human hands. The new product got an unmistakable boost by being launched under the aegis of the minister of finance, indicating a continuing focus on short term financial gain, rather than long term health planning.

Wedge at the end of the Mediterranean, Lebanon strives to find its way between differing cultures and continents. The images promoted by

multinationals and more recently the state sponsored tobacco companies are of hip, trendy, and successful young persons enjoying the ideals more commonly attributed to the west. Most recently, a picture of a bikini clad young woman lying beside a swimming pool in Beirut and smoking a water pipe was widely circulated. To traditionalists, such pictures will undoubtedly portray an image of Lebanon not welcomed by the eastern world. But to others, it will seem an affirmation of the country's future prosperity. To those who want to profit from western minded young consumers, such images must seem like helpful free marketing. Whatever their cultural significance, the lifestyle they illustrate has serious implications for the health of future generations of Lebanese people.

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## USA: TIME's lingering double standard

The cover of TIME magazine on 17 October 2005 invited readers to learn about “living better longer”. There was no tobacco advertisement on the back cover that week, but the following week it was business as usual with a Camel ad depicting a young female model. US health advocates say this illustrates a recent trend: when a publication carries a major health article heralded on the cover, the rest of the magazine tends not to contain tobacco advertising, but it resumes in the next issue. In the past, it was not unusual to find a striking announcement of a health article on the front cover, and a full page cigarette advertisement on the back of the same issue (see the TIME covers shown in

*Tobacco Control* 2003;12:338). Some think the latest trend marks a minor step forward, while others reckon it is merely a refinement of double standards. The real motivation is probably commercial: tobacco companies know that, as in politics, a week is a long time for the truth about smoking to linger, allowing the glamorous fable to be resumed untainted.

## India: still at the bravery game

In our last issue, we reported the good news that Godfrey Philips, Indian subsidiary of Philip Morris, had decided to abandon the bravery awards scheme it had used so successfully for many years to promote its Red & White cigarette brand (see *Tobacco Control* 2005;14:297). However, it has already become apparent



TIME still carries advertising for tobacco products, although now not usually in the same issues as those featuring articles focusing on health.



Toilet cubicles covered with EU health warnings in use at the XX World Youth Day 2005 in Cologne. Photos: Rainer Holz/Bär + Knell; [www.baer.knell.de](http://www.baer.knell.de).

that the company sees far too much benefit from the scheme to give it up altogether.

In its heyday, the Red & White Bravery Awards let Godfrey Philips to run massive advertising and public relations campaigns around India, soliciting nominations for various categories of personal bravery. Apart from associating the name, colours and logo of Red & White cigarettes with laudable human qualities and roping in opinion leaders to hand over the awards, the presentation ceremonies allowed the company to schmooze up to the good and the great. State government ministers and senior civil servants always found time to attend, even though they may have been seriously behind with such tasks as, say, implementing tobacco control regulations already passed by parliament, but requiring some slight bureaucratic action to become effective.

For the cigarette makers, losing the brand name was only a partial defeat: by changing the name of the scheme to the Godfrey Philips Awards, they could still run the gravy train for the influential people they need to cultivate for the sake of their commercial future. So it was that late one night in October, the Burning Brain Society, the non-governmental organisation whose legal case led to the banning of the brand name for the awards, learned that the scheme was going ahead again, with the name of the company in place of the brand, in their own state, Haryana. It was to take place the very next evening in the prestigious Taj Hotel in the state capital, Chandigarh. Even the awardees themselves, as well as journalists the company hoped would cover

the event, were only informed one day in advance.

The society immediately fired off urgent pleas to everyone from the state governor and first and deputy first ministers of the state government, to the police and the hotel, and even to the president of India. Setting out a formidable list of well argued reasons why the event contravened the provisions of tobacco promotion law, and the interpretations of the court, they urged the recipients to cancel or at least boycott the event. While no immediate response was received from politicians or officials, and the event went ahead as planned, the disappointment of those concerned with health must be set in context.

It may not seem like it now, but the latest saga from Chandigarh almost certainly signals the death throes of a particularly cynical and inappropriate form of tobacco promotion. After all, what had once been an open, public show of glory proclaimed by a wealth of advertising and press coverage before, during and after the awards ceremony, has rapidly shrunk to a covert affair whose very existence was kept secret until the last moment.

This sort of trend has been seen in other countries, such as Australia, where social acceptability as well as laws forced changes once thought impossible. Tobacco companies that once flaunted the glorious garb of corporate munificence, have sunk to quick and furtive grabs at the hem of decision-makers' raiment, in situations reminiscent of the speak-easy. If pressure on politicians is maintained, it may be increasingly difficult to recruit worthwhile guests of honour. And with secrecy paramount, the company's

accountants may be the ones to take the bravest, if inevitable decision.

## Germany: health warnings at your convenience

German artists Bär + Knell came up with the idea of using the European Union health warnings to cover nearly 1000 temporary toilets used at the closing event of the XX World Youth Day 2005 in Cologne in August. The toilet cubicles extended in lines totalling more than 1.5 km, and were visited by many of the nearly one million young people who attended the event, many of whom kept a joint vigil with the Pope before spending the night in the open air. The idea went deeper than the shocking images that faced casual visitors to the cubicles. Gerhard Bär of Bär + Knell observed that the toilet has always been a place where communication takes place—one need only think of all the graffiti that graces the walls of public toilets, he said, or the legendary humour scrawled inside. Toilets are the “quiet places” where you have time to think, but they are also the locations where the first cigarettes are secretly smoked behind closed doors, where drugs are sold and consumed—and, sometimes, where people die. At the end of the World Youth Day the toilet tents were due to be cleaned, dismantled, and re-erected in 1000 school playgrounds all over Germany. The project was carried out in collaboration with the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Tobacco Control in Heidelberg.